

29 November 1963

25X1

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Viet Cong Quasi-Governmental Activities

1. In the "armed liberation" strategy of both Mao tse-Tung and Ho Chi Minh, the establishment and gradual extension of "secure" base areas is a primary objective in the struggle. Within such secure areas, the Viet Cong have, since the beginning of resistance against the French in 1945-46, attempted to carry out quasi-governmental functions. Their purpose is two-fold and sometimes contradictory. They seek to win the voluntary support of the population by various activities of a welfare or civic-action nature. By example they try to show that they are more efficient, honest, and humane as administrators than the enemy regime. At the same time, they are concerned with exercising control and extracting support in the form of manpower, food, and labor; these requirements frequently take priority and undo any favorable effects from their psychological operations.

2. In areas still not "secure" or not under strong Viet Cong influence, the guerrilla forces must live a hit-and-run existence and have little opportunity to act as the effective local administration. In these areas they must nonetheless rely upon support, shelter, and supply from the civilian populace, which is obtained not only by force but by positive steps to convince the population that its aspirations are those of the Viet Cong.

3. Much of our detailed knowledge with respect to Viet Cong activities in these directions comes from the period of Viet Minh resistance against the French. There is sufficient current reporting, however, to leave little doubt that the same pattern of activity is still being followed.

4. Viet Minh documents captured during the Indochina war frequently dealt with a program to raise rural living standards--the "new life" program. Such documents often contained statistics on

25X1

the establishment of schools, numbers of children and adults in school, medical dispensaries, numbers of trained medical aids and midwives, sanitation efforts including numbers of wells and latrines dug, and food and livestock production. This effort and various other governmental activities were carried out under the authority of Administrative-Resistance Councils set up at the regional, provincial, district, and town levels.

5. A similar Viet Cong hierarchy of military, politico-administrative, and Liberation Front Committees now exists in South Vietnam, but Viet Cong troops themselves are frequently the agents of both governmental and civic-action tasks. While force and terrorism remain a major Viet Cong instrument against local officials of the South Vietnamese Government and recalcitrant villagers, recently captured Viet Cong documents clearly show that Viet Cong troops and agents are ordered to provide assistance to peasants and to avoid antagonisms and abuses, such as looting or violation of churches and pagodas.

6. A Communist land reform program in South Vietnam, begun by the Viet Minh, is still being carried out under the Viet Cong, but some difficulties have been encountered. This is reflected in the attitude of the Liberation Front, which watered down its initial emphasis on land reform, although free and unconditional distribution of land to poor peasants is still a part of its platform. [redacted]

25X1

[redacted] indicate that early attempts by the Viet Cong to force "middle-class" peasants to give land to the poor were too harsh, caused peasant disputes and loss of production, and depleted the source of funds available for peasant loans and for support of Viet Cong troops. As a result, there appears to have been some modification of Viet Cong land reform activities to lessen pressure on "middle-class" peasants and encourage higher production. Although there are some references to communal farms, the Viet Cong do not appear to have stressed land collectivization in South Vietnam, where popular reaction to North Vietnam's brutal agrarian reform policies has been adverse.

[Redacted]

7. Current reports also indicate that the Viet Cong provide assistance to peasants in land clearance, seed distribution, and harvesting, and in turn persuade or force peasants to store rice in excess of their own needs for the use of guerrilla troops. Controls are apparently imposed in Viet Cong zones to prevent shipments for commercial marketing in Saigon, or to collect taxes on such shipments. The Viet Cong themselves often pay cash or give promissory notes for the food they acquire.

8. Little detailed information is available on current Communist health and sanitation activities. Captured Viet Cong doctors or medical personnel indicate that dispensaries for treatment of Viet Cong wounded often are scattered inconspicuously among several peasant homes in a village, and that civilians are treated as facilities and supplies permit. Civilians as well as guerrilla forces are almost certainly instructed in methods of sanitation and disease prevention, but apparent shortages of medical personnel and medicines in some areas suggest that medical care for civilians in Viet Cong-dominated areas may be spotty.

9. There are also references to primary and adult education, much of it in the form of indoctrination, and to Viet Cong - run schools operating almost side by side with government schools, under the excuse that peasants lack the necessary documentation required to enter government schools. A Liberation Front broadcast of 19 November 1963 claimed that there were some 1,000 schools with 2 million pupils in "freed areas" of South Vietnam. These figures are doubtless exaggerated, but may be a gauge of a fairly extensive Communist educational effort.

10. A standard Viet Cong technique of gaining a foothold among tribal minorities in the highland areas of South Vietnam--where Communist encouragement of tribal autonomy gives them a political appeal--has been to select promising tribesmen, take them to North Vietnam for training in welfare activities as well as for political indoctrination, and return them to tribal villages where their new skills tend to assure them positions of prestige and leadership.

SECRET

25X1

11. The Viet Cong also promote cultural activities--heavily flavored with propaganda--through press, radio and film media, as well as live drama and festivals.

25X1

12. There is little firm information about the Viet Cong effort to develop "combat hamlets." They appear to exist in areas where control by either side is missing or tenuous, and sometimes are located near government "strategic hamlets." Reports indicate that, like strategic hamlets, they are fortified externally, and their inhabitants are carefully trained in defensive procedures and escape routes, often interrelated with other nearby hamlets. Similar defensive systems have long prevailed in Viet Cong - controlled areas, although Viet Cong installations themselves may be innocent looking and easily evacuated buildings or huts.

13. A Viet Cong document discussing the successful construction of a "combat hamlet" indicates that primary stress is laid on determining the basic wants and needs of the inhabitants--frequently their concern for their own land. Propaganda is directed at convincing them that the government is threatening their interests, that defensive measures must be taken, and finally that offensive actions against government officials and troops are needed. The peasants presumably come to regard the Viet Cong as their protectors and to cooperate voluntarily with the Viet Cong military effort.

25X1

SECRET